1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

the preparation of the *kaghai* site is a task to be accomplished by the whole village. Disputes are practically unknown, owing to this strong feeling of community of interest. There is, moreover, in the Abujhmar hills ample land for all, and any man is free to work harder than others if he likes to cultivate a larger plot; but he seldom does so unless he either is a newly married newcomer to the village, bent on building up a reserve of grain, or has a large number of dependents. There is no guarantee that a man will have the same plot as that allotted to him when the *kaghai* was last previously cultivated, or even a plot of the same area; but in villages where land is not so ample as in others, and a *kaghai* may be cultivated therefore at shorter intervals, each man as far as possible is allowed the same plot that he occupied at the previous cutting, though he may have to contribute a part of his former land to accommodate newcomers or newly married youths. There are villages where either the *kasyeq-gaita* or the *gaita* is a strong man and has arrogated to himself a right to allot the *penda* plots; but he would get short shrift if he were unfair in his allotting: he is not a chief, but only *primus inter pares* among the village elders.

Plots once allotted and cultivated are for the time the private property of the householder who cultivates them, and he marks the limits of his cultivation either by leaving certain tree stumps to serve as boundary marks (the Bison-horn Marias who retain permanent rights over their *penda* plots are especially careful about this, the boundary trees often being left intact and not even lopped, save in so far as necessary to keep birds off the *penda*), or by planting lines of roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) or of *til* (*Sesamum indicum*) along the edges of his plot; roselle with its crimson seed-vessels and *til* with its deep yellow blossoms make very vivid boundaries.

Each family fells its own *penda* plots, and the villagers do not combine to clear each plot in turn as they combine in threshing. The work takes two or three weeks, and the men do all the heavy work, though women and children assist in cutting small trees and undergrowth and in arranging them for firing. Any fruit trees are carefully spared. If any of the ground is dug up with *gudari* hoes, men do most of the work, though they leave it to women on the flat *dippa* lands or on the gentler *penda* slopes. The iron *pulu* digging stick is used for grubbing up roots large enough to be a serious impediment. Much timber, when the growth is heavy, is reserved for fencing the *penda* against wild animals, where any herds of deer survive. The wood is left to dry through the heat of April and May, which are holiday months.

When the wood is dry, the *kasyeq-gaita* calls a meeting in the village dormitory to fix a day for firing. All the villagers combine

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

one visits the celebrations of other clans. The first new-eating is preceded by about four days by the *pira-mansha* or disease-riddance ceremony. Before holding this, the *kasyaq-gaita* obtains the permission of the clan-god. In the early morning every woman sweeps out her house, and the *kasyaq-gaita* goes to each house and collects a little of the sweepings in a winnowing-fan. Before noon all the males of the village go out to the western boundary, and there the collected sweepings are cast aside, either in the winnowing-fan, or else wrapped in rags and tied round a bamboo stick. They hang up on the boundary on cords between trees all their old winnowing-fans and broken baskets. Unmarried boys hang up on a wooden frame at the boundary all their stilts; they make these at the beginning of the rains, and use them from then till this ceremony, their use being taboo at all other seasons: for some reason not divulged, the manufacture and use of stilts is taboo throughout every fourth year. Eggs are offered near the old winnowing-fans and stilts.

The final new-eating, *Pupal Korta Tindana*, is the important occasion of the year. The greatest celebration of this seems to be that of the Usendi clan at Orcha, where their clan-god is brought from Japgunda. From miles around other clans send their youths to dance at the Orcha *Koqsar*; the girls come to carry their food for them, and, though excluded as a matter of course from the ceremonies, join in the dancing that follows *Koqsar*. At the clan new-eating gathering the village delegations assemble in the usual way with new pulses and grain, and the clan-priest sacrifices the cocks and pigs which they bring and sprinkles their blood on the clan-god. Then, however, the flesh of the victims is not divided up and carried off to be eaten in the houses, but boiled with the grain, etc., brought by the villages, in the clan-god's cooking pots kept at his *pen-ravar* in a special shed. When cooked, the stew is spread on a great dish of *siari* leaves stitched with thorns or bamboo splinters, and all the men sit round it on stones in a great circle, while the clan-priest goes round and, with his hands, serves a helping from the communal dish in each man's leaf-plate. The *Koqsar* portion of the festival seems to be the orgy of dancing that follows; for it should be remembered that in most of the Abujhmar country this festival signifies the end of the long period during which it is taboo for the men to sleep in their houses and to have sexual intercourse. It is not a coincidence that the drums are beaten with the same rhythm at *Koqsar* and at weddings.

Small villages often do not have a separate *Pupal Korta Tindana* before the Village Mother. But in the larger villages, especially where the *udam-garya* custom prevails, the village celebration is

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

important, for then the *kasyeq-gaita* and, in a minor degree, the secular headman have their hour of glory, and something of the honour that might be paid to real chieftains. The *kasyeq-gaita* as intermediary between the Village Mother and her children sacrifices to her a pig and a cock, and sets before her a basket of new *kuthi*, pulses and beans. A feast similar to that before the clan-god follows. Then the *kasyeq-gaita* proceeds to his *udam-garia* or seat-of-honour, next to which may be a smaller seat for the secular headman (*gaita* or *peda*); it is either a long, flat boulder, or a flat stone supported on stone legs, as in Plate XXIII. He wears no insignia, and is to all appearance as naked and poor a Maria as all his villagers. The men seat themselves around in a circle on little stone cromlechs. Then the *kasyeq-gaita* formally announces the programme for the next year, what *penda* slope is to be cultivated, what arrangements are to be made to meet State or zamindari demands for land revenue or labour, and so on; the announcements, it is true, are the results of previous informal village discussions, and not the *kasyeq-gaita's* orders independently conceived by him, but his formal promulgation is needed before they can be brought into effect.

After *Koqsar* they are free to cut grass and bamboos, and to collect forest produce, or to hunt; it is true that in most villages there is little game but hares and field-mice, but a Maria thinks a field-mouse the rarest of delicacies, and will stop any occupation to chase a mouse or dig them out.[1] But the long year is over at last, and till the next sowing, though there is ahead the labour of felling, spreading and firing the wood for the *penda*, taboos are lifted, and there is no fear of harm to growing things from the queer magic inherent in sex. So now is the season of new marriages and of conjugal life in the home, and the seed is sown for the raising of the human crop.

Assessment and payment of land revenue among the Hill Marias

It has been indicated that there are the beginnings of permanent cultivation among the Hill Marias. As a matter of fact, several villages have traces of old rice embanked fields. Two things long effectively checked the spread of permanent cultivation. One, before the 1910 rebellion, was the presence of a police station at Kutul, the headquarter village of the Bardal clan and *pargana* in the very heart of the Abujhmar hills. This meant a constant demand from the Kutul police for rice as *bisaha*,[2] and

[1] I had a carefully arranged beat for a family of man-eating tigers at Kutru ruined because the Hill Maria beaters rushed in wild enthusiasm to catch two or three mice disturbed by the beat.

[2] See p. 14 above.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

on one occasion for the Pen and on another for the Village Mother; even at the annual village festival of the Mother following the clan harvest-home and Koqsar of the Hill Marias the Pen, if honoured, is sometimes honoured on the same stones as the Mother, and not at a separate cairn. It is useless to expect to get any clear-cut distinction between the three conceptions out of a Maria, whose religious ideas are vague and inchoate. He knows only that there are factors which may bring trouble or which may benefit, and that the wise clan and village duly propitiate them, though, if in their turn these unknown factors fail to reciprocate, they will get no further meed of sacrifice for the same immediate object unless the desired benefit is at once granted. An example of this attitude has already been given in the mention in Chapter VII of the deputation that went to see the Gume clan's god to protest against rain preventing the firing of the *penda*, and to promise him a cock if and when he stopped the rain. In the actual formulae pronounced by the village *kasyeq-gaita* in the hills and the *perma* in the Bison-horn country at the sowing and other ceremonies, however, I have never heard the clan-god's name mentioned; they start almost invariably with '*Bhum kenji, Talugh kenji!*' 'Earth hearken, Mother hearken!', sometimes addressing similarly '*Nel*' or fields and '*Jimme Jaga*', all that is around. Here *Bhum* and the clan-god appear to be identical; in the villages where there are both a *kasyeq-gaita* and a *bhum-gaita* in the Abujhmar country, it is the latter who has to preside over the village deputations to the clan-god. The distinction, however, is not clear-cut. In most hill villages there is no separate *bhum-gaita*, and the *kasyeq-gaita* not only performs his work, but is sometimes called *bhum-gaita* or *bhumia*, while in Bison-horn villages the *perma* is *bhum-gaita* and addresses himself in some tracts to the Earth both as Bhu-deo and Bhu-devi, earth-god and earth-goddess, besides being the priest of the Village Mother and the other forms which the earth takes in Bison-horn cults, such as Dongar Deo or Kodo Deo. The *waddai* or *modul-waddai* I have referred to as the clan-priest, and it has been seen how in the Hill Maria clan-areas each village goes to him for the celebration of the clan festival and for obtaining the clan-god's permission to hold the village festival. But the clan-priest is generally not the clan headman even in the Abujhmar hills tracts where the clan-area has become the modern *pargana*. He may or may not be a person of ability and influence. He should be the medium, into whose body the clan-god enters and through whose mouth the god makes his will known to his clan. The secular *pargana* headman is a man of far more influence; and in the villages the *kasyeq-gaita* and the *perma* are religious headmen in a way that the clan-priest seldom is

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

in the clan; often the same man is both religious headman and secular headman (*gaita*, *peda*), and these functions were probably always combined before the growing interference of the State with village life and the excessive demands for forced labour and supplies began to make the secular headmanship a burden to be avoided by the true leader of the village and put on to the village simpleton.

The Village Mother is always dealt with in Hill and Bison-horn villages through the *kasyeq-gaita* and the *perma* respectively; but she neither enters into the body of a medium nor can be consulted through one like the clan-god. Though it be through her that the *kasyeq-gaita's* eggs are addled or other omens of ill or indications that the village should shift are sent, yet to make plain her will the medium of the clan-god, that is the clan-priest (the *waddai* or *modul-waddai*), is sent for, and through his mouth the clan-god expounds the will of the Unseen Powers. It is tempting to regard her as the personification of the female and the clan-god as that of the male element in the reproductive powers of the Earth or Bhum; needless to say, there are no Maria theologians to worry themselves over such distinctions, and it is not a clear-cut one, since some clans have a clan-goddess, not a god; e.g. Oghal Muttai, goddess of the Dhurwa clan, and Gumtuli, goddess of the Padali clan of Padalibhum at Adnar. This conception, nevertheless, does to a considerable extent clarify the fundamental relation between the Earth, the clan-god and the Village Mother. The other point to be remembered is that the clan-god is the Earth in its dealings with the clan, and the Mother the Earth in its dealings with the village. No woman or girl may take part in the festivals, public sacrificial meals, worship and intercession of either clan-god or Village Mother.

The Earth, then, as clan-god, is the god of nourishment and reproduction, and of life itself; the Marias are his children, fed by him. For them to raise their sustenance he divided up the land among the clans, and the clan-area among the villages, and in each clan and village he appointed priests or headmen who alone might communicate with him, and to whose first ancestor he revealed the clan and village boundaries, which knowledge has been handed down from father to son. The Maria leaves his *penda* slope for another after two or three years because the god is suffering from having too much nourishment extracted from that slope, but he will return to it when the god has recovered from his exhaustion. Children are but one of the god's crops.

The Clan-god

In form, we have seen, the clan-god of Marias of both kinds and of Murias, is a framework of three parallel *saja* logs held together by cross-pieces of bamboo or *saja*, to which they are lashed by cords of *siari* creeper or twisted

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

she came. The second circumstance was the fact that, to some extent, I could spur their memories from the record of a 1916 Sessions case in which Moda and two other members of the family had been sentenced to imprisonment for life for the murder of a fourth member, Usendi Bhosa. The family was, moreover, one of considerable social importance. It has the hereditary right of providing the secular headman of both the village of Orcha and the large Chhota Dongar *pargana*, while the Usendi clan is one of the strongest in the Abujhmar hills, and the Koqsar festivals of its god Wikir Hunga attract people from far and wide. In most families it is impossible to get beyond the paternal grandfather, if indeed beyond the father and mother; but though the names are forgotten, obligations are not; and many, if not all, Marias remember the clans and families with which they have cross-cousin marriage alliances. Of 105 Hill Maria marriages investigated, fifty-seven were marriages between cross-cousins; it is not so easy to check the remaining 46 per cent. in which the marriage marked the start of new affinities, at least as between the two contracting families, if not as between the clans.

On the other hand, a man touring as the administrative head of the State has the advantage of always having many Marias from different clans and villages assembling at his camps, and so of ascertaining their matrimonial alliances and testing practically any clan lists which he may have made or obtained elsewhere. But here a further difficulty crops up. Communications among the Hill Marias are very bad, and it by no means follows that an Usendi living, let us say, on the southern edge of the Chhota Dongar *pargana* has the same views on the clans from which it is permissible to seek a bride as an Usendi in the Chanda part of the Abujhmar hills or in the northernmost Maria *pargana* of the Antagarh tahsil. There is always a tendency to limit clan jurisdiction to the administrative division; though investigation will reveal much intermarriage between one *pargana* and the next, even though one should be in one tahsil and the other in another, in a zamindari or even in British territory, yet the investigator will be assured that 'we do not take wives from that clan or village because it is not in our *pargana*' or 'our raj'; and it has already been seen that when members of a clan migrate from their clan-area to colonize lands deserted by other clans outside the *pargana* they no longer consider themselves under any obligation to attend their original clan-god's festivals.

This much has been said by way of introduction, and of apology if, as I fear, this chapter is the least satisfactory and the least final in its conclusions.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

The civil matters ordinarily decided by the *panchayats* would be marriage cases, such as settling the compensation to be awarded to a husband when his wife had eloped with another man. But tahsildars would entertain complaints under the sections of the Indian Penal Code punishing adultery from a husband dissatisfied with the *panchayat's* decision, and thereby undermine yet further the authority of the *panchayat*. I have in an earlier chapter referred to the effect of the unconscionable demands for forced labour and supplies on the position of the village headmen, and shown how in consequence the tendency was to put forward a dummy as the headman for secular matters, the real leadership of the village remaining with the religious headman, that is to say, the *kasyeq-gaita* in the case of the Hill Marias, and the *perma* in that of the Bison-horn Marias, but the dummy being available to bear the brunt of official wrath, though powerless to effect anything without the consent of the village elders. Formerly, there seems little doubt, the *kasyeq-gaita* and the *perma* also discharged the functions of the secular headman; the differentiation of the two functions was the result of the State officials' treatment of the aboriginal. In many Abujhmar villages the functions are still combined, or are held by members of the same family, because State officials were always loath to penetrate into the interior of the Hill Maria country. With the revival of the authority of the headmen and *panchayats* that is now the policy of the State, it may be expected that gradually the religious headmen will resume the secular headmanship also.

It is not surprising that, as the result of these methods of dealing with the aboriginals, their *panchayats* tended to co-operate as little as possible with the State; their object became to conceal crime from the police and in general to comply with State requirements only so far as was necessary in order to avoid trouble, and, above all, visits of subordinate State officials to their villages. The records of murder and other trials show many cases of the village elders meeting and deciding to hush up a crime, especially if it had occurred at harvest or any other busy agricultural season, rather than have the whole life of the village community disorganized by police investigation, committal proceedings and Sessions trial. Such crimes may have come to light later through the *panchayat* reporting them at their own convenience, or through the widow or other relative of a murdered man being dissatisfied with the compensation which the murderer had been ordered to give, while in some *parganas* informers arose who subsequently used their supposed prestige with the police to become petty local tyrants. Conversely on occasions *panchayats*, disgusted with the failure of the police to investigate thefts or with the acquittal of guilty persons by the

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

623 692 tahsildars, took the law into their own hands and had the thieves killed.

623 692 564 Purely social matters, breaches of caste or tribal prejudices, were left by the State to the jurisdiction of caste *panchayats* and of the caste headmen, appointed for nearly all Hindu and semi-Hindu castes in the State by the Ruling Chief in the tahsils and by the zamindars for their own zamindaris; after the first appointment these offices tended to become hereditary in the family of the person appointed, the succession having to be recognized by the Ruling Chief, from whom the headmen of leading castes would receive a turban as insignia of office. A register of these headmen is kept, and appeals from their decisions in caste *panchayat* in social matters lie direct to the Ruling Chief, this power during the long minority of the late Maharani of Bastar having been exercised on her behalf by a relative of hers who manages the State temples at Jagdalpur. But the State never appointed caste headmen for Hill or Bison-horn Marias, who retained their own tribal customs in these matters, and whose *panchayats* did not, like those of Hindu castes, deal only with social matters, but also with petty crime and with the administration and agricultural management of the villages and clans, as well as their relations with the officers of the State. To some extent the Murias were in the same position; but in certain areas caste headmen had been appointed for them, and they had learnt to defer to the Palace as the ultimate arbiter in social matters, while great numbers of their villages had been granted to alien lessees who asserted their own authority and belittled that of the traditional headmen and *panchayats*.

622 623 692 A text for the enquiries which I had made into the *panchayats* of the Marias was the following passage from the appendix to the chapter on caste (Chapter IX, p. 239) in Marten's 1911 *Central Provinces and Berar Census Report*:—

'The following account of the tribal council of the Maria Gonds of South Chanda has been sent in by the Manager of the Ahiri estate, and is worth quoting almost in full. Every genuine Maria village has a village headman or *patel*, called the *Gaita*. In addition to his office as a *gaita* he generally exercises also the hereditary functions of a *Bhumia* or religious headman of the village. This dual office used formerly to be held as a rule by one and the same man in the village, and, with a few exceptions here and there owing to poverty or loss of influence on the part of the *Bhumia*, it is still so held in the majority of cases. The man enjoying the double office is therefore the patriarch of the whole village community, and his authority in the village (or a group of two or three villages) under him is supreme. This post is hereditary. The caste has not a standing Panchayat or governing body. It is called together when required. But the system prevailing in the caste is far more developed and is in certain respects more far-reaching than the ordinary Panchayat system prevailing in other castes. The village *Gaita*, on receiving a report of a misdemeanour or other occurrence in the village, calls two or three elders of the village together—the number is not fixed, nor is it necessary to call the

623 692

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

632 692 morning the *Sendhia* repeated the necessary spells, and, collecting together all the *Gaitas* of the *patti* with the Kotmi fellows, sprinkled fresh well water over their heads and declared Kotmi as re-affiliated to his *patti*.

'This specific instance illustrates not only the great power exercised by the *Sendhia* in his *patti* but also the fact that it is impossible for a village to alienate itself from a *patti* or to disregard the authority of a *Sendhia*.'

632 The South Chanda *patti* thus described seems to be very like the clan-*pargana* of the neighbouring Bastar Hill Marias, though much larger, if the figure of from 50 to 100 villages in each *patti* is correct. Actually, however, the *patti* probably includes several clan-areas or, at all events, villages of several clans, though I have not been able to make any enquiries in Chanda. The designation *Sendhia* is used in the Bhopalpatnam zamindari of Bastar for the headmen appointed by past zamindars over the local Naikpod, Kapewar, Barod and Dolod (Pardhan) castes; among Bastar Marias, however, the term appears to be used only in the Kutru Mar *pargana*, of which Arki Burga of Jegur, a village south of the Indrawati, was in 1930 the hereditary *sendhia*. But his sole function was the reclamation of any Maria guilty of a breach of social rules, and he had no other rights or authority, nor was his presence essential in any *panchayat* except one convened to deal with cases of outcasting. He was in no sense a headman of the *pargana*, and had none of the authority of the *sendhia* of Chanda or the *pargania majhi* or headman of the Maria and Muria *parganas* of Antagarh, Kondagaon, Jagdalpur and Dantewara tahsils in Bastar. In fact, there were no *pargana* headmen for the Kutru Mar and Bhairamgarh Mar *parganas* of Kutru zamindari, the *gaita* of the parent or principal village of a clan being the nearest approach to a *pargana* headman; when Arki Burga was asked to become *pargana* headman he refused; the little actual influence he possessed over the Kutru Mar *pargana* was shown by the fact that he had left the *pargana* to live at Jegur. The headmen of the Hill Maria *parganas* of Antagarh tahsil are sometimes called *sethia*.

632 622 In the two Hill Maria *parganas* of Kutru the village *gaita* is often still both religious and secular headman. The clans are small, and their villages not always contiguous. The *gaita* of the parent village may not actually decide all cases from each of the other villages, but he can interfere with the decisions of the *gaita* and elders of the other villages, and the latter often refer cases to him; for the decision of such cases he sits in *panchayat* with the *gaitas* of all the other villages of his clan. Examples of these small clan groups are the Gumelor villages of Dunga, Pariakot and Goti in Bhairamgarh Mar and the Mohanda villages of Lakka, Puslakka and Bhuri in Kutru Mar; of the former group the headman of Pariakot is the head *gaita*, though Dunga is the parent village, for the ancestor of

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

the headman of Pariakot was headman of Dunga when he founded Pariakot from Dunga; of the latter group the headman of Lakka, the parent village, is the head *gaita*, and has since been appointed *pargana* headman of the Kutru Mar *pargana* as the most influential headman in the *pargana*. In these cases, as generally among Hill Marias, the *waddai* or clan-priest is not the headman of the clan. But the Marias of Kutru south of the Indrawati and of the adjacent parts of Bijapur who are of Hill Maria origin modified in culture by contact with Bison-horn Maria and other neighbours, have usually their *waddai*, by them designated *modul wadde*, as the secular head of the clan as well as clan-priest. The names and villages of most of these clans have been given in the footnote to page 202. The post is hereditary, but the holder is sometimes deposed if he does not duly propitiate the clan-god or is oppressive. In matters affecting the State and in ordinary village routine he has no authority (unless he has been recognized as *pargana* headman), the village *peda* and *perma* being supreme; and in ordinary village *panchayats* he probably takes no part, except in his own village, and even there probably only as a member, the *peda* being the president. As social arbiter he decides tribal cases, such as breaches of social rules and marriage disputes, at the annual harvest festival, there known as the *Pindi Pandum*, with the aid of a clan *panchayat* of the leading *pedas* and *permas* of the clan villages.

Among the Hill Marias of Antagarh tahsil, that is to say of the greater part of the Abujhmar hills, we have seen that the *parganas* are clan-areas, the exception being the large Chhota Dongar *pargana*, where, however, the Usendi clan predominates and is recognized by the other clans as the chief clan of the *pargana*. The man now recognized by the State as the *pargania majhi* or headman of each of these *parganas* is the hereditary clan headman or *pargania gaita*. He is the chief headman of the village headmen of his clan rather than clan headman, for, though orders issue as his orders, they are issued always after consultation with a *panchayat* of the leading headmen, religious and secular, and elders of the villages in the clan-area. Any attempt on the part of a *pargania gaita* to presume on his position to make himself a little chief or tyrant is fiercely resisted by the clan; one of the reasons for the 1916 murder at Orcha of Usendi Bhosa, the headman of the Chhota Dongar *pargana*, was the belief that he was trying to 'set up a *raj* over Metabhum'. Similarly in villages the headman's authority is rather that of the spokesman of the village elders than his own individual authority. If the tahsildar sends word to the *pargania gaita* that, for example, a camp or camps have to be prepared in his *pargana* for the Diwan, or that on a certain date each village in the *pargana* has to supply

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

men for road repairs, the *pargania gaita* cannot merely send out orders to the headman of each village in his *pargana* assigning his village a share of the *pargana* task. But he has to send out his *garhai* or messenger, a clan servant remunerated in grain at two or three *paili* per cultivator, to call in the *gaita*, *kasyeq-gaita* and leading elders of each of the clan villages to a meeting at his village or some central spot, at which he arranges the distribution of the work in consultation with them. Similar meetings are called for arranging collections of money or grain for any clan festival, such as Koqsar, or any special disease-averting or tiger-averting ceremony. In a dispute between some of his villagers as to the distribution of the work he naturally would give the final word; and similarly when he calls in selected village *gaitas* to sit with him to decide inter-village disputes or to interfere with what he considers a wrong decision of a village *panchayat* he may have the final word. Strictly speaking, he is at liberty to dissent from the members of his meetings and *panchayats* and to insist on his own view being the final view in the matter; but in practice he would get short shrift if he made a habit of going against the majority. In actual fact, therefore, we have here a tribal organization very similar to that postulated by Mr. C. U. Wills, I.C.S., in his monograph on 'The Territorial System of the Rajput Kingdoms of Medieval Chhattisgarh' (see pages 4 and 33 above) as the foundation on which the Chhattisgarh Maharajas superimposed their roughly feudal system. In the village the *kasyeq-gaita* or the *gaita* is merely *primus inter pares* in regard to the village elders and in the clan or *pargana* the *pargania gaita* in regard to the *gaitas* and *kasyeq-gaitas* of the other villages of the clan or *pargana*. The natural democratic tendencies of the tribe not only are a bulwark against mismanagement by State officials, but also block any attempt on the part of a village or *pargana* headman to become a local despot. We have seen already[1] how even when the *kasyeq-gaita* of the village enthroned on his *udam-garia* stone seat of honour at the Koqsar festival announces the agricultural programme of the coming year he is issuing no independent orders, but merely confirming *ex cathedra* the decisions already reached in *panchayat* between him and the elders. These stone seats for the *kasyeq-gaita* and *gaita* are almost the only outward sign of their primacy in their villages; and in some villages they sit on them also to preside over meetings of the elders for administrative or judicial work. The photograph on plate XXIII opposite this page shows the *kasyeq-gaita* and *gaita* of Itulnar thus seated in *panchayat*.

In the Bison-horn Maria country there are no contiguous clan or phratry areas, and the *parganas* often represent former petty

[1] See page 141.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

622 623 632 kingdoms or *garhs* of forgotten chiefs, or divisions of the early medieval Telanga kingdoms of Barsur, Dantewara or Bhairamgarh. The Marias there are perhaps later arrivals, spread over a land once ruled by comparatively civilized and organized Telanga princes. There are *pargana* headmen, with wide influence and authority; but their authority possibly does not derive in the same sense from the clan, and may have been conferred in the not very distant past by the State because of the obvious advantages of having such central intermediaries between the State and the tribes. They have to deal with villages of many different clans, and far larger villages at that than those of the Hill Marias. These villages are still throwing off new *para* or hamlets, which often become bigger than the parent village, and soon for practical reasons have to have their own *peda* and *perma*, though these will be called the *chudala*, or small, in contrast to the *birya*, or big, *peda* and *perma* of the parent village. Among the Bison-horn Marias, therefore, it is natural to find the village *panchayat* exercising a more real authority and greater independence of the *pargana* headman and *panchayat* than among the Hill Marias. Nevertheless the formal recognition under the recent State orders of the *pargana* headman and his *panchayat* as a court of appeal from the judicial decisions of the village elders is bound to strengthen his position. The Bison-horn Maria has always been more in contact with and more ready to learn from the outside world than the Hill Maria, and there are many village and *pargana* headmen who show real leadership and force of character.

689 564 684 688 Social offences involving exclusion from tribal ceremonies and feasts are very similar in these days to those of neighbouring Hindu castes. The worst offences are to get maggots in wounds, to take food from or have sexual relations with persons of the despised Ghasia, Mahra or Lohar castes, and to break the rules of exogamy by having sexual relations with a girl of a brother-clan. Another offence, which among the Bison-horn Marias may lead to considerable trouble, is the eating of any new crop or the cutting of grass or bamboo before the appropriate *pandum* has been celebrated; this form of sacrilege is believed to be avenged by the earth or clan-god sending tigers to carry off cattle or men, and in a case which came before me in which such a visitation had followed the cutting of grass by two villagers before the Kare Pandum the *panchayat* had ordered them to compensate the owner of each cow or bullock killed by the avenging tigers. The way in which breaches of the rules of exogamy are dealt with has already been described (pages 245-6 above). Any form of social relations with Ghasia, Mahra or Lohar, however unwitting, entails penalties not only on the actual offender, but also often on his near kinsmen. In the

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1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

In the chapter on marriage we saw how the elders had to witness the betrothal ceremonies, and how the *panchayats* deal with cases of divorce and elopement. It may be added that among the Hill Marias the clan-headman, like the *Sendhia* of the Chanda Marias, gets certain traditional fees which the parties have to pay in addition to the compensation which the *panchayat* may award to the injured parents or husband, or to the cost of the tribal feast; at every marriage in Kutru and Bhairamgarh Mar the clan-headman gets a fee of eight annas; when a *panchayat* has settled the compensation to be given to the first husband by the man with whom his wife has eloped, the old and the new husband have each to pay the clan-headman four annas. But the latter is expected not to retain the whole of his fee-income, but to divide it with the headmen of the villages of his clan who have assisted in the ceremony or *panchayat*.

I have already described on page 246 above, the ordeal to which the Gume Hill Maria clan *panchayat* in 1929 subjected a Toinar youth accused of incest with a girl of his clan. How far the ordeal survives in the remotest parts of the State I cannot say; naturally instances of its use very seldom come to light. There is reason to believe that ordeals of this kind were a regular feature of the 'justice' administered by bygone Chiefs and zamindars of Bastar, rather than a product of aboriginal thought; compare the account of the settlement of the Kudmer-Jatalur land dispute at page 96 above. Ordinarily, however, the *panchayats* follow no regular procedure beyond hearing the parties and their friends as informally as possible and deciding the case then and there after free discussion among themselves.

Questions of property seldom arise among the Hill Marias, there being obviously so little scope for dispute when 95 per cent. of the cultivation is shifting cultivation of hillsides regarded as the property of the clan and not of the individual, and when the village site is shifted at least every six years. Sons after marriage live in a separate portion of the long-house of their father or uncle, if there is space for adding a portion for them, or else build a separate house as close as possible; when next the village is shifted there is ample space for all to live in separate houses under one long-house roof. Questions of inheritance of houses therefore arise only when, as among the Bison-horn Marias, villages have become permanent and are not shifted at regular intervals. Even here, however, there are few disputes. The little value set on houses is shown by the fact that it is generally the youngest son who lives on in the father's house after his death, as probably his elder brothers will have married long before him and built separate houses for themselves on marriage. There is among the Bison-horn Marias a vague right to demand

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

565 tribes controls and practices[1] evolved in non-tribal areas. Culturally
177 therefore on the whole the zamindari administration has had a detribalizing influence. Economically by encouraging the opening up of the country and the settlement of outsiders it has led to economic exploitation of the Marias by money-lenders, village watchmen, and forest contractors.

655 The Allapilli forest depot on the other hand, with its sawmills
466 attracting a constant stream of Marias as seasonal labourers, cartmen,
166 etc., and with all its operations conducted departmentally by the Forest Service, has saved the aboriginals from exploitation by forest contractors and money-lenders. It has helped tribesmen to pass through the early stages of the difficult transition from an economy in kind to a cash economy. Rent and land revenue have to be paid in cash, salt and cloth to be bought for cash. Remote

●622 [1] For example, the suppression of *podu* cultivation, or the deliberate
791 curbing of the traditional influence of the religious and secular headmen, the *bhumia* and the *gaita*. A footnote to p. 453 of the *Chanda District Gazetteer* by the then Court of Wards Manager of the zamindari thus describes the latter process:

> The *Bhumia* is a Maria institution. He is the man responsible for all the religious ceremonies of the village; all the arrangements for their observance are framed by him, but the actual ceremony cannot be carried out without the help of the *pujari* of the village. In return for his services he is paid dues in grain and *mahua* from every tenant in the village. The office used to be hereditary and was transferable by sale or gift. The *Bhumia* was generally a man of great influence, and no village was founded or could hope to thrive without his formal permission. He was very much the headman of the village and the office is even now highly prized. The *Bhumia* is not necessarily always a headman or *Gaita* of a village; sometimes the offices of *Bhumia* and *Gaita* are separate; this separation usually is due to poverty or loss of influence on the part of the *Bhumia* which necessitates the appointment of a man in a stronger position to manage the village, though the *Bhumia* still continues to draw his dues so long as he has not sold or transferred his right. *Gaita* is the term in general use for headman or *patel*. Before the estate came under the Court of Wards the *Bhumia* and *Gaita* were a power in the land, and it lay with them to make or mar a village, and the zamindar very seldom, if ever, received his full dues; the *Bhumia* and *Gaita* paid for one plough and cultivated five or six and in many cases also appropriated the rents of tenants who took up lands in the village.
>
> 'This has all changed since the estate came under Court of Wards and the position of the *Bhumia* and *Gaita* have been clearly defined at settlement. The former is now purely and simply considered a religious official, and has no connexion with land whatever; the office is hereditable but not transferable and the original appointment of a *Bhumia* to a waste village rests with the zamindar. The *Gaita* is now simply a headman or *patel*, who is paid a commission of two annas in the rupee on rentals and one anna in the rupee on *siwai* (miscellaneous) income as remuneration for his services.'

There could scarcely be a clearer example of administration divorced from anthropology. Imagine deliberately dissociating the *Bhumia*, the Earth-priest, from the land or *bhum*. Fortunately tribal custom has still proved too strong for the complete success of this 'reform'.

I: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

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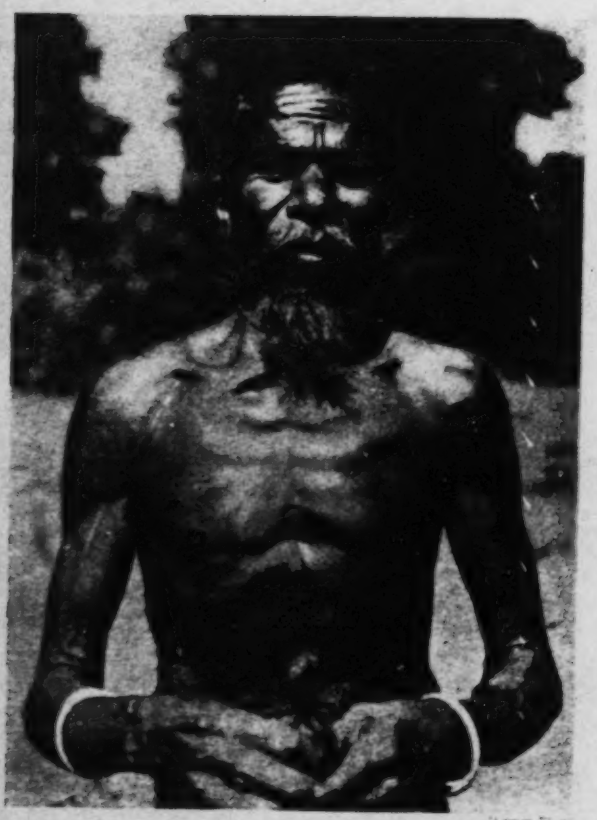

Markami Hunga, Bison-horn Maria headman of Marandia

[End Plate C]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

623 [631] lay to the Pargana Manjhi and his panchayat which consisted of four headmen chosen from his group of villages.

In the ten years since these panchayats were established, they have done a great deal of work, and on the whole may be said to have functioned very well. A few headmen have abused their positions; there has been a certain amount of diversion of fines to uses for which they were not intended; probably a number of less influential people have not always had the justice that they might have expected. But this might have happened even in the ordinary Courts, and there is no doubt whatever that the establishment of these panchayats has done a great deal to build up the self-respect of Maria and Muria, and has developed leadership among them.

622 623 The importance of the panchayat for our subject is obvious. In the first place, it provides a body of semi-official elders in every village whose duty it is to assist the police, and indeed whenever a suspicious death occurs in a village, the investigating officer calls the panchayat for a sort of inquest to which he acts as coroner and they as jury. On the other hand, the establishment of the village elders in a position of considerable authority makes it easy for them, when they wish to do so, to conceal a crime or deal with it themselves. Where a headman is himself the culprit, he may force the people to hush up his guilt; and the solidarity that is created by allowing the village under its own elders to settle many of its own affairs helps the headman to attain this end. This is no argument against the establishment of the panchayat. But it does mean that it is important for the authorities to hold the confidence of the headmen, and to inspire them constantly with a sense of their civic duties.

793 Side by side with the secular leaders are the religious elders of the village, though there is no reason why spiritual and secular functions should not be, as they often are, combined in the same persons. The priests and medicine-men naturally have more influence than the official headmen, the most powerful combination being when the headman himself is a Waddai or Siraha.

Chief among the religious elders is the Bhum-Gaita or Perma, the priest of the soil whose duty it is to see to all the sacrifices concerned with the village and its festivals, and